

Church Vision and Mission

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Date: 20 January 2019

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're going to do something slightly different this morning, not typically in a sermon I would preach week to week.

I am going to look at the passage that we read together from John's Gospel, chapter 4, but I'm also going to spend longer than I would normally do applying it because on your way in you would have got this kind of information card and a bookmark.

So it's really just something as leaders we've been thinking about and dealing with for quite a while that we want to, well and everyone to have a summary of who we are, what we believe we are and our vision, our priorities, our goal as you see in our commitment.

So I'm going to speak a little bit about that. I hope that you'll take these with you, that you'll recognize that the hour in these headlines are, include you, that it's not their church, it's not the leader's church, but it's our church.

This is what we are, this is what we're trying to be together. And so I want to just, again we're still in January, we can still count that roughly as the beginning of the year that we're going to look at this vision and a little bit and our mission in the light of who Jesus is and how important He is for us in our lives.

[1 : 29] Okay? Kind of scene setting in a sense, in a scene setting for the year. But what I want to do first is just remind ourselves about Jesus and remind ourselves about Jesus' life, Himself being driven by spiritual vision.

And I've just taken a snippet of Jesus' life from one of the gospels, from John's Gospel chapter 4. It's part of the story of Jesus meeting with the Samaritan woman and it's towards the end of that story.

And I just want to think about one or two things here about Jesus and His vision and His mission that we can learn from and take for ourselves, I hope, in our lives.

Not in a technical, not in a corporate legislative kind of way. I don't mean that, I mean in a really personal way as we seek to understand how much Jesus Christ is the author of love and of grace and how that motivates everything that He is and everything He does and how much we need that.

How much we need that in our own lives and as we share that with other people. So we see that Jesus' life was driven, the first thing I'm going to say is Jesus' life was driven by spiritual, by a spiritual vision.

[2 : 54] In other words, it wasn't just flesh and blood that drove Jesus on, it wasn't just what He saw and what was around Him. I think that comes across very clearly in verse 32 where He says that He's hungry, okay, and the disciples are hungry.

And so while He was speaking to this woman at the well, the disciples went into the town to buy some food for them. And they come back with the food and they said to Him, Rabbi, eat.

And He said, but He says to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about. So the disciples say to one another, they don't really understand what He's eating. Has He got a pie?

Has He got something tucked away that no one else knew about? Has He got food that we do? Was there a carryout further down the road that we missed? He got, no. He said, look, my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.

So you see, He's got a spiritual motivation. He is physically hungry, but He's got a spiritual motivation in His life and He uses His physical hunger to get across a spiritual message about Himself, about not just Himself, but about us as well.

[4 : 06] His spiritual food and drink is to do what His Father has sent Him to do. That's His food. Previously, earlier on the chapter, and we didn't read this, when the Samaritan woman that He speaks to, and I'll say a little bit more about that in a minute, when He speaks to her, and she offers Him water from the well, He says, I've got water that you don't know anything about, living water, and if you drink from that water, you'll never be thirsty again.

And again, He's using her physical thirst to try and open up in her life a spiritual truth. He's using her physical reality to get across spiritual truth.

In other words, He's saying that forgiveness, in reality, a broader way of saying it, forgiveness and a relationship with the Father through Him is what will slake our thirst and will give us the satisfaction that the ordinary food and all that it represents can't do.

And that's a really important reminder to us in our church and in your life as a Christian that as we go from day to day in our lives, maybe away from the church, remember I said at the beginning, church is like a window into eternity, but it's not like that for us every day, is it, life, but Jesus reminds us we're not just human animals.

That's one of the things He's reminding us here. We're not just, it's not enough for us just to have food and drink. It's not enough for us just to eat and to be satisfied and to drink and live for the next meal.

[5 : 34] Now, please don't misunderstand me, eating and drinking isn't wrong and isn't unimportant, obviously, clearly. That's the case, not the case. It's an important part of life.

We're God's gifts and we give thanks to Him for His gifts, but it's not the sum of living. It's not why we live. We don't live for the next meal. We don't live for the next night out.

We don't live for the next pleasure or satisfaction that we can get in this life, the nourishment and joy, and even the health that all these things represent, important though they are, it's not the sum of our lives.

It's not the sum of living. And Christ, our lives have more significance and more importance, and that's what Jesus is reminding us here that His life, hungry though He was for bread, was more than just food and drink.

He had a spiritual dimension that He'd come to bring alive in all of us through His work that He was doing on His Father's behalf. So it's not just flesh and blood.

[6 : 37] We're not just flesh and blood. It's not just that we live to wake up the next morning for whatever that morning will bring. But also we see that He was someone, because of His mission and His passion and His grace, He broke with convention.

He didn't do, He wasn't conventional. In the beginning of the first verse that Mary read was just then His disciples came back and they marveled that He was talking with a woman. But no one said, what do you see here?

Why are you talking with her? The woman herself was surprised when Jesus initiated conversation earlier in the story. She says, why are you, she said, a Jew speaking to me a Samaritan?

So it was something they didn't do. They didn't mix. There was no mixing between these two races. And as a religious leader of the day, it was very atypical, very unusual for Him.

In fact, it was quite outspoken for Him to be speaking to a woman at all. He shouldn't have been doing it in His culture and in the religious and cultural mores of the day.

[7 : 49] And yet He sees beyond that, because Jesus is never conventional. You go back to Jesus again and see how unconventional so much of His life was, even in His culture and the religion of His day.

He spoke to this woman because He loved her, because He saw that she was spiritually blind. She didn't get what He said about slaking her thirst with this living water.

She said, you know, give me this living water. She said, so I'm not need to come back to the well again. You know, she couldn't really see that He was speaking about something that wasn't physical. She thought it was a kind of elixir that she could drink once and then never be thirsty again physically.

It wasn't like that. She was spiritually blind and she was lost. She was in a bit of a mess in her life. And he knew that. You know, she'd been married several times. She was probably ostracized from her community, which is why she was gathering water in midday when none of the other women were there.

And there's all kinds of unspoken things that may have been in her heart and life that we don't know. But he wanted to speak to her because he loved her and wanted to offer her real life, life she had never found, because she was estranged from God.

[9 : 03] He was willing to be shocking and surprising and risque. You know that because elsewhere, you know this, you know this, because in Matthew chapter 11, you know, don't you, that Jesus was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton because he ate with tax collectors and sinners.

That's again breaking the culture and the religious expectation of his day because he was driven by a love for people, by a love for the outsider, by a love for the person who was rejected by the culture and the religion of his day.

This is the Son of... Can you imagine anyone accusing Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard, the Son of God? God in the flesh. He broke with convention.

And I do think that's worth considering and I do think it's worth discussing. I've written out questions from today like we did a couple of weeks ago for Thomas's sermon, and they're the basis of the discussion on Wednesday at Citigroups.

So do take time as we discuss this sermon on Wednesday if you're able to go. Think about your life and think about your life in the church and think about your life in the world.

[10 : 18] Do you think that together or individually that we're just altogether to tame?

That we just have... We've tamed the gospel and we're people-pleasing conventionalists. It's all about sticking with convention in the church and in the world in which we live because we want to be safe.

We're not willing to take risks for Jesus' sake. We want to be accepted and be acceptable. And to not break with convention in our workplace or in our families or in our churches because we want to go with the flow and we don't want...

We maybe don't have that burning, sometimes that burning passion for Jesus and for people that allow us to be risque for Him in His kingdom.

That's a great discussion to have. But we also see from Jesus that He was willing to... He was sent to finish a task, wasn't He? In verse 34 we're told that.

[11 : 25] Jesus said, My will is to... My food is to do the will of Him who sent me to accomplish His work, His Father's work. He humbled Himself as God, eco with God.

We saw that when we were looking at the Trinity earlier on. He's eco with God and power and substance and glory. And yet He emptied Himself of that in order to take on flesh, to become a human being.

This great Son. And the Father sends, the Son goes, the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies. They all have their roles.

They all have their work. Equal persons, different roles. But Christ's meat and drink, isn't it? Christ's resondettra is to do His Father's will, which becomes His will.

And that is the only way for us back to the Father, isn't it? Because on the cross, at the end of the darkness, at the end of the time on the cross, He says, It is finished.

[12 : 30] He's come to do the Father's will. I've come to finish, He says, accomplish His work. And on the cross, He says, It's done. It's finished. So something hugely significant happened on the cross.

He finished what the Father had sent Him to do. Our sin and our failure, which He takes in Himself, becomes His on the cross. He takes our hell and He pays the price for it on the cross.

Accomplished, finished. That's what He came to do. That's the unseen work. Not just to have a bacon sandwich, not just to have food and drink, something much more than that.

He comes to do the Father's will to finish the task that He'd come to do. Amazing. And we're all involved in that as believers today. We're part of that finished task.

Our names are engraved in His hearts. And that is true for any who will come motivated by outstanding love for us. So He was sent to finish His task.

[13 : 30] And we also see from Jesus here that He wants us to be also people who are sent. In verse 35, He says, He talks about the harvest and the harvest fields being white.

And in verse 38, He says, I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor, others have labored and yet you've entered into their labor. And Thomas mentioned that a couple of weeks ago as well. That whole day they've been called and also being sent.

And He sends us as Christians, as followers of Jesus, as believers, like the Samaritans who came to faith here because of the testimony of the Samaritan women. He says, now we believe ourselves, not just from what we've heard from you, that this man is the Savior of the world.

That was a remarkable claim. It's a kind of big claim, isn't it? Not just that he's a good guy, he's a prophet, he's someone worth talking to, he knows about our hearts. This guy is the Savior of the world, and these people became ones who were sent out as well as the disciples, as well as others in the Great Commission to open our eyes and to see ourselves and to recognize that life is more than eating and drinking and not all that represents.

That's what makes you different when you go and have your lunch in the canteen this week. The eating and drinking isn't your reason for being. That it's not simply the best meal, the best time, the best pleasure, the best entertainment, the best joy that we can have in this life.

[14 : 58] However much we can praise and glorify, and thank God for that, but there's a spiritual dimension to our lives that our satisfaction and our identity and our purpose in life is more than what is put before us on the dinner table.

We're sent, we're sent to do something more glorious and greater than cooking a great meal. It's more than that. However great and thankful we are for these things, we're called to be sowing and reaping a spiritual harvest together.

That's our calling. Our calling, not my calling, not the leader's calling, not special people. It's all our calling. It's to live our lives in the places we are with that recognition that our eyes have been opened and spiritual life is more.

Our life is more than just the sum of our parts, as it were, the sum of our physical parts and all that that means. And you know, that's a great thing, especially as you get older.

That is a great thing, especially as you get older, that your life is not the sum of your parts. Even if you fall apart, it's really great to know that that's not all that life consists of.

[16 : 12] You know, in this life, when you pass 35, there's no point, is there? For most people, everything's gone by then. If you have nothing beyond what this life has to offer and the brokenness of this life in this world, and youth is everything, isn't it?

Youth is everything. But the great thing about the believer is that we are getting younger every... I'm getting younger every day inside, so there, to all you young people.

I'm getting younger. And that's a great thing. So you've got people like Ken who serve and serve because they're getting younger every day because they have a spiritual recognition that this life is not all there is in eating and drinking is not the sum of what we are.

So that's Jesus. And briefly, can I just talk also a little bit about our own vision and the light of who Jesus is and the light of what He's done for us. Some things we often fail to see because often our eyes...

I think sometimes our spiritual eyes are shut. And we're not really looking spiritually from day to day. I think sometimes we think that of ourselves, spiritually is in a waiting room, waiting to catch that midnight train to eternal life.

[17 : 26] You know, when God calls us home, we get on that midnight train and then bang, we're in eternal life. But what Jesus is saying here, eternity starts here and now. The harvest is right now.

And often we fail to see that. And that's why we can be unconventional. That's why we can be rebellious. And that's why we can aim to not live like everybody else in the workplace or everyone around our social order or even in the church.

Jesus broke the conventions of the church as well. You know, for the love of the lost, for the vision of seeing what's at stake, it means we can break all the rules, all the human rules that sometimes we make for ourselves that constrain us and that allow us just to live in tripping along conventionally.

And He allows us to break these. It's good that we should be shocked and that we should be surprised by Jesus.

We should be like His disciples. You know, they were surprised and shocked that He was doing what He was doing. And we should look at the Gospels and we should say, yeah, no, no problem.

[18 : 42] We should be shocked and surprised by what Jesus demands of us and asks of us because that's what love is like, isn't it? Love, in that way, His divine love is so radical and so shocking and so different that it should make us sit up and isn't that why it's just dreadful if we preach boring sermons?

And if you come to church for some superific ride so you can just catch up on the sleep you've missed because that's what it's just like. You know, we just sit here quietly and just pass through it.

We should be shocked and excited by who Jesus is and by... But often we don't. And what He says is that time is short, you know. That's what He's saying here, that the fields are ripe for harvest now.

He's taking an illustration and saying, no, no, no, no, I'm changing that physical reality of having to wait for a harvest and wait four months and maybe just, you know, reap eternal life at some point.

And now is the time for it's a kind of...it's a paradox, He's saying, isn't it? He's saying, you sow now, but you're also reaping now. And it's not that...it's not enough just to say that, oh, I'm just going to be faithful and I'm doing my best and hopefully sometime, whether I'm here or not in the future, God will bring a harvest.

[20 : 02] He's saying, it all comes together, we sow and we reap in His kingdom. What is it? What is it in our lives that we give weight to? We give weight to things that matter to us, the things that are important, don't we?

Genuinely. Whose will is it that matters in our lives? Because that's what...again, it's the key of this passage is that what Jesus says here, my fruit and drink is to do the will of my Father.

And that's a remarkable phrase. And it gets to the very heart of discipleship. We're talking about discipleship this year. If you're asking about what it is to be a Christian, if you ask them what it means in your day-to-day living, how I...this is the core, this is the key, absolutely the key.

It's like Jesus was giving that test in the Garden of Gethsemane. He either walked away and called down a host of angels, said, get me out of here. I'm a celebrity.

Get me out of here. I've had enough of these people. Let the angels come and take me home. That's my will or the temptation. He says, no. You know, if there's any other way, Lord, is there any other way?

[21 : 13] No. He says, sweats drops of blood. They're so great. Hematodrosis, his capillaries burst in his forehead and the blood mixes with the sweat because of the tension.

And he says, not my will, but yours be done. That's what he says. That's the key to his obedience. That allows him to go to cross and be the obedient son that becomes our Savior. And in Christ we can say the same.

You know what I often say? I do God's will. Yep, I do God's will. As long as it's my own as well.

That's what I say a lot of time. I'll do God's will as long as it dovetails with mine, as long as I agree. Yeah, that's not a lordship. That's servitude.

We're taking God and making us an all year Santa Claus. But the challenge for us is when his will is clearly different from our will.

[22 : 09] And we can only know that when we know his will, when we know his word, when we know what his commands are, what we know, what grace looks like and forgiveness and commitment and all the different things he speaks about.

And when we know our calling, genuinely that's the core of it for us when we can say, not my will, but yours be done. That's why we're called. Not because it's oppressive or because it's enslaving or because it's harsh, because we're created to follow him and created to do his will.

We're called to sacrifice and follow in his will and not spectate. So this gospel community, this church, it's our calling to seek as a body but also as individuals to serve him.

It's our prayer and our desire as a leadership team of elders to live out our calling and to have a gospel vision and a mission that keeps Christ at the heart.

That's what this card is about. It may be rubbish. It's certainly incomplete and I'm sure it can be improved upon.

[23 : 16] It's absolutely imperfect but it's our philosophy of ministry and I think it's worthwhile knowing a little bit of who we are and where we want to be and how we want to get there. I don't want us to be as our people, stationary, thoughtless, unappetizing, treading water.

And I know that we have so much to do. In a couple of, a few weeks, as you know, and I'll maybe say more about, I'm going to Memphis to a missions conference to the church that, gathering a lot of the other churches that support us financially in our church planting and they want to hear about what's happened here in St. Columbus.

And you know what my title is? You know what the title of my talk is that I told them? Hanging on to God's coattails. Because that's what we've done here from the very beginning and sought to do.

It's God's work here and we've struggled and we've failed and we've fallen off the coattails and we've not done things properly all over the place but we're seeking to hang on to His coattails by knowing His vision and always learning and seeking by grace to make a difference in Edinburgh with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So we have this vision. It's not like other churches maybe. Every church is different, isn't it? But we are here in the middle of Edinburgh and our vision is to be a city center church committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and worship mission community and discipleship with a vision to plant churches in around Edinburgh.

[24 : 46] Okay, that summarizes what we are. If you can learn it, great. Do it with the next catechism. It will make you live longer when you learn to memorize things.

It's great. Memorizing is great. It's tremendous and we can all do it. We've all got the capacity to remember things. It's just about organizing it in our heads. So that's our vision. And our goal remains, I never know the difference between goals and visions and all that kind of stuff, but our goal is really these four G's that we've spoken about a lot in the past.

The grace, the four things that matter in our ongoing life is the grace of God, the gospel of God growing together as Christians to the glory of God. These things are, you know, these are core realities for us.

They matter for us and it helps us to focus, helps us to remind ourselves about how important we are to each other and what our priorities should be and how we need Him daily.

And I guess the point of it is really to try and maybe overcome the distractions that sometimes get into church life and our individual life. I can't be bothered with all these things. I can't be bothered with people and I can't be bothered with the way they fail me and let me down and the differences in a church and personalities and tensions and the idols that we all battle with.

[26 : 03] And yet, so it's an attempt to focus on that, our goals and our priorities. Well, it's listed there in the blue box there.

These are the things we try and focus we try and remember that we're a worshipping community. As the church grows, you know, we can become all-consuming organizations. We don't want that to happen.

We want you to have time to live out grace. We want you to have time to make the friendships that show the love of Jesus Christ in the way that He showed to the Samaritan women.

We want you to take risks in the kingdom. We want you to break convention and we want what we do to help you both by what we are together and by what we teach and equip you to do in your lives.

And as we seek to live that way, that becomes not just the way we live, but the way other people see we live. Nobody, excuse me, nobody will come to a church where people hate each other and have no time for each other and have uncommitted to each other.

[27 : 15] It's just not attractive and it's not the outworking of Jesus Christ. And we care because we see spiritually and we see where people are spiritually and we see their need of Jesus Christ.

We're disciples, we're disciples, we're learners and we're seeking to be that together. We're seeking to be it in the churches we multiply.

We would love to make more churches. So many need, so many needs for church, so many impossibilities. And this year we want to spend time training future leaders by developing an apprenticeship program here and more so.

And Thomas is responsible for that. But I want us to stand with all, I stand here in all my weakness and my fear. And I want you to stand with me as I stand with Martin Luther, okay?

And say, here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen. That's what I want. That's what I want us to do. I want us to link together with one vision.

[28 : 23] With all our failure and fallings and failings and mistakes and learning and come together. This is where we are. This is what we believe.

This is who Jesus is. This is what he did for the Samaritan women. This is why we want to live like this ourselves. And so we find that our commitments are all based also around where our motivation and when our strength has come from.

It's nothing new. It's the Bible and prayer. It's what we call the ordinary means of grace. Going back to food, breakfast might not be that exciting. And maybe week to week our food isn't that exciting.

Well, it is in my house. It was wonderful. Every meal is just a dream. But when Katrina makes it anyway. But you know what it is, we've got ordinary meals.

I remember my dad used to say when he came back from Lewis Comedians, where he'd be fed like a king for four days and put on a stone and a half, he would come back and say it's back to plain Jane and no nonsense.

[29 : 21] And that's really what our ordinary meals are like, aren't they? They're just ordinary meals. And sometimes that's what we need to get back to in our spiritual lives.

The ordinary means of grace. The coming to church. The reading of your Bible. Listening for God. Regularly praying and asking Him into the tough difficulties of your life.

Reading and not alone but together. Can I just read that if I can find it? That many different bits of paper with me today. That reflection that I've quoted very often here in the church, C.S. Lewis, about prayer.

I pray because I cannot help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time. Waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.

Is that how we view prayer because we see spiritually the veils being lifted from our eyes and we say, well, I can't do this.

[30 : 22] And I can't save anybody else. And it's just too great a problem and the needs are too great and the world is in such a mess. It's just too great. But prayer drives us to that place of great need because we need Him.

And He doesn't. That's all He wants from us. We don't need to give Him the answers. He simply wants us to recognize that He is Lord. He is sovereign.

He is in control. And His plans and purposes for us are good and that we need Him every day long. The work in this congregation since 2001, and I know before that as well, but I'm only telling you, it's like Him here, has always been impossible.

It's always been impossible. And the Kingdom work and the commission that He gives us in Matthew 28 has always been impossible. And this city needs salvation.

This city needs Jesus Christ. We need to speak to those whom we love who are living blindly, only for food and drink, looking for satisfaction apart from God, who is their maker.

[31 : 25] We need to reach out to them. So our commitments are the same, you know. Excellence, simplicity, generosity. We want to do all the things we do well.

Sometimes we fail. Lots of times we fail. But we don't want to give God just the fag ends of our lives. We want to give Him the best, even though it's voluntary.

We want to give Him the best. Not after our career, after our family, after our pleasure, after our eating and drinking. We want Him to be Lord in all of these areas and commit all of these things to Him for faith to be the heartbeat of all of it.

Say we want to be simple, leave room in your life for Him, for meditating on Him, for sharing Him with others.

And one thing I really love, and I say, end with this, is generosity. We speak about that here. And that's the heart of Jesus, isn't it?

[32 : 25] That's the heart of the story of the Samaritan woman, is Jesus' generosity. He was offering her something that nobody else could offer her, and offering it with love and with commitment and with risk.

Grace was his heart motivation, and it was that risk that nailed him to a tree. And generosity is such a beautiful thing, and it's that heart of the gospel.

Meanness is from the pit of hell. Okay? So generosity, and I'm meaning broad, in every way, in every way, it's such a beautiful thing. There are time, money, attitudes, judgments.

You know, churches have been so generous to us, it's been unbelievable. Churches we've never met, churches that have never asked for anything of us, they have poured from their mission's budget to this small, insignificant church in the middle of Edinburgh, so generously it takes my breath away and leaves me speechless.

And I hope that we share that generosity of spirit as we apply grace in all its applications in our lives, generous in our marriages, generous in our families, generous with our neighbors and our friends, generous with the grace that he's been given, not stingy, not keeping it to ourselves.

[33 : 48] And I hope that you're able to look at that card again and again, take it with you. Do take it, it's a bit of an awkward shape just for keeping. So the bookmarks really great to keep in your Bibles or someone else but this.

My fridge magnet, it could go, a couple of stickers on, could be in your fridge, you could be there, that place where you go to eat and drink every day, and it could remind you of deeper pleasure and satisfaction that you'll find as we follow him.

Let's pray. Father, God help us to live for you, help us in all our weaknesses and failures to rely on you.

May Jesus be held high in this church. May many people this year come to faith in Jesus through our lives, through our witness, through our seeking to share the gospel, through the one to one Word Bible studies through.

Just our friendship and our commitment, and may we learn from amazing, excuse me, amazing example of Jesus and his commitment to spiritual reality in a very physical world.

[34 : 56] It wasn't that he was an ascetic, it wasn't that he was a monk, and that he was separate. It was Lord that you were in and among people, you were eating and drinking, you were accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, which you were not.

But you did so because you loved people and because you wanted them to see a deeper satisfaction and a deeper need and along. May we see that, may we live it, may we embrace it this year, may this be a great year for us, for the church plants, for the gospel in Edinburgh and all the churches that are serving you and in our nation, and indeed in our world, we do pray for Jesus Christ, and we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So help us God. And we pray, I pray especially for any who might be here today who are not yet believers who don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord, who have not entrusted their hope for life and eternity to him.

We pray that they may see today your beauty through all the words that they may see your beauty and may see that you alone can offer peace and forgiveness and the perspective of being in relationship with you that we were indeed created to be.

Take away that estrangement we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.